

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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EXHIBITION OF PRINTS BY MAX KLINGER OPENS MAY 17

Graphic Works of Max Klinger, an exhibition of 54 prints by the visionary German artist (1857-1920) and precursor of surrealism, will be on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from May 17 through June 18, 1978. The prints, which include works from the celebrated cycles A Glove, A Life, Dramas, and On Death, are on loan from the Carus Gallery in New York City and are being circulated in the United States by the International Exhibitions Foundation, Washington, D.C.

In his time a highly successful painter, sculptor and engraver, Klinger is today chiefly admired for his graphic works which vividly portray his own fantasies and anxieties as well as the psychic and social disorders of our modern age. The Italian surrealist painter Giorgio de Chirico praised his ability to make the most fantastic visions seem real. His work also strongly influenced the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch and the German social realist printmaker Käthe Kollwitz.

The son of a prosperous Leipzig soap manufacturer, Klinger studied in Karlsruhe, and then Berlin, where at the age of 21, he exhibited a series of highly imaginative drawings which brought him immediate critical recognition. The series, entitled collectively, A Glove, depict bizarre fantasies springing from an incident in the artist's life, his theft of a glove dropped by a mysterious beauty at a Berlin roller skating rink. A few years later, Klinger translated these drawings into etchings. Published in five editions, A Glove remains his most famous series of prints.

(more)

Leaving Berlin, Klinger worked for varying periods in Brussels, Munich, Paris, and Rome before returning to settle permanently in Leipzig. Between 1879 and 1915 he produced fourteen print cycles, of which eleven are wholly or partially shown here.

The themes of these cycles illustrate two contradictory aspects of Klinger's art: first, his absorption with classical mythology, and the realm of the imagination; and second, his concern with reality and contemporary social problems--the oppression of women, urban violence, and poverty. This dichotomy is central to Klinger's art and was present from the outset of his career. While he deeply admired the 19th-century German realist painters, he was also intrigued by the grotesque fantasies of Goya. At the same time that he was reading Darwin and the realistic French novelists Flaubert and Zola, he remained devoted to the fantasies, often horrific, of early 19th-century romantic literature.

Some of the finest prints in this exhibition dealing with imaginative themes are the plates depicting episodes from the legend of Prometheus, from Brahms Fantasies, a suite of etchings and lithographs freely interpreting compositions of Johannes Brahms, a close friend of Klinger. Fantasy and reality intertwine in A Life, a series of etchings chronicling the fate of a woman who is abandoned by her lover, ostracized by society, and forced to turn to prostitution. On the other hand, the cycle entitled Dramas--showing scenes of adultery, suicide, murder and revolution--is starkly realistic, with some of the subjects actually based on contemporary newspaper stories.

Of particular interest from a stylistic standpoint is the cycle On Death, Part I, a series of ten prints describing various ways in which death can come unexpectedly to people of all stations and ages. Many of these plates are enhanced by prominent borders designed to extend the narrative or amplify the meaning of the central image. This device is also found in the prints of Edvard Munch, who adopted it from Klinger.

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The power of Klinger's imagery derives largely from his ingenious and skillful manipulation of graphic techniques. By combining etching, his predominant medium, with the smooth washes of aquatint, he achieved a wide range of contrasting tonal and textural effects. Mezzotint and lithography were introduced in Brahms Fantasies; one plate from this cycle, "Evocation," is intriguing for its unconventional combination of etching, engraving, aquatint, and mezzotint. Some of Klinger's plates are incredibly rich in detail; others owe their effectiveness to a judicious use of empty spaces.

Illustrations and interpretations of Klinger's prints, including the ones in this show, can be found in Graphic Works of Max Klinger, written by J. Kirk T. Varnedow with Elizabeth Streicher of Columbia University and published by Dover Publications, Inc., 1977. The paperbound book is available for \$5.00 at the Museum's sales desk.

Graphic Works of Max Klinger is installed in the Prints and Drawings Galleries on the Museum's ground floor, where talks will be given at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, May 17, and Sunday, May 21.

The Cleveland showing of the exhibition is assisted by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact Ann Edwards, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.